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SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES¹

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH²

THE early history of the High School for Girls in Boston is full of interest. The movement in the School Committee for the establishment of such a school began in May, 1825, when the Rev. John Pierpont proposed the appointment of a special committee "to consider the expediency and practicability of establishing a public school for the instruction of girls in the higher departments of science and literature." At that time, as for the thirty-five preceding years, girls were allowed to attend the grammar schools of Boston for six months in the year, from April to October. The committee appointed under the Pierpont resolution brought in a favorable report, which may be summarized as follows:

In the first place [so reads the report], in regard to the *general* expediency of placing women, in respect to education, upon ground, if not equal, at least bearing a near and an honorable relation, to that of men, in any community, your committee think that no doubt can, at this day, be entertained by those who consider the weight of female influence in society, in every stage of moral and intellectual advancement; and especially by those who consider the paramount and abiding influence of mothers upon every successive generation of men, during the earliest years of their life, and those years in which so much, or so little, is done, towards forming moral character, and giving the mind a direction and an impulse towards usefulness and happiness in after life. As to the *general* expediency, then, of giving women such an education as shall make them fit wives for well-educated men, and enable them to exert a salutary influence upon the rising generation, as there can be no doubts, your committee will use no arguments at this board; but will confine themselves to the *particular* expediency of provision for a higher education of our daughters, at the public expense.

The particular arguments for the establishment of the school are:

First, that it would afford a needed stimulus to the brighter

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² Continued from February number, 1899.

pupils in the grammar schools, who under the conditions then existing were "in constant danger of falling into habits of inattention, and mental dissipation."

Secondly, it would furnish to the city a supply of competent teachers for the primary schools.

Thirdly, it would present a favorable opportunity of trying the monitorial system of instruction, which, if successful in this school, might thereafter be introduced into the grammar schools.

With reference to the studies to be pursued, the committee proposes "that some be *required* and others only *permitted*, as tokens of merit and incitements to industry."

Finally, with reference to the expense involved in the experiment, the committee urges the view that good schools are in the long run economical.

When liberally supported, they more than support themselves. They are a source, not of honor only, but of pecuniary profit, to the city; for, taking into view—as an enlightened policy does take into view—the whole period during which these institutions exert their influence upon the community, they more than indemnify the city for the expense of their maintenance, in that the knowledge they diffuse through the great mass of the population throws open new and wider fields to enterprise, gives higher aims to ingenuity, and supplies more profitable objects to industry.

The City Council was asked to appropriate two thousand dollars for the school, which was done "with great unanimity"¹ on the 25th of September, 1825. In October, the School Committee adopted the report of a sub-committee on the organization and standing of the school proposed. The following are the proposals of this report with reference to the admission of pupils and the course of study:

Your committee would propose that the candidates for admission to this school shall be *eleven*, and not more than *fifteen* years of age; allowance, in particular cases, to be made according to the discretion of the School Committee; that they shall be admitted on examination in those studies, which are pursued in the public Grammar Schools of this city; and that the examination may be strict or otherwise, as the number of candidates shall hold relation to the accommodations provided for them:

¹ QUINCY, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

That the *course of studies* in this, as in the English High School, shall be calculated to occupy *three years*:—

That, in pursuance of the suggestion of the original report on this subject, some studies shall be *required* of all the scholars, and others *allowed* as evidences of honorable proficiency, and as motives to higher efforts; and that the following be the studies of the school, according to the order in which they shall be pursued, until otherwise ordered by the School Committee.

FIRST YEAR

Required: No. 1. Reading—2. Spelling—3. Writing words and sentences from dictation—4. English grammar, with exercises in the same—5. Composition—6. Modern and ancient geography—7. Intellectual and written arithmetic—8. Rhetoric—9. History of the United States.

Allowed: Logic, or botany.

SECOND YEAR

Required: Nos. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, continued—10. Bookkeeping by single entry—11. Elements of geometry—12. Natural philosophy—13. General history—14. History of England—15. Paley's Natural Theology.

Allowed: Logic, botany, demonstrative geometry, algebra, Latin or French.

THIRD YEAR

Required: Nos. 1, 5, 12, 15, continued—16. Astronomy—17. Treatise on the globes—18. Chemistry—19. History of Greece—20. History of Rome—21. Paley's Moral Philosophy—22. Paley's Evidences of Christianity.

Allowed: Logic, algebra, principles of perspective, projection of maps, botany, Latin, or French.

On the 13th of January, 1826, the school was formally established by the School Committee. The success of the English High School for boys had greatly encouraged the promoters of a similar school for girls. Some doubts were expressed, however. There were conditions likely to affect a school for girls which did not obtain in the case of a similar school for boys. The number of applicants for admission to the High School for boys had not exceeded ninety in any one year. The whole number of pupils in that school at this time was only 146. The fear that a much larger number would apply for admission to the High School for girls led cautious men to prophecy disaster; and the new school "was adopted expressly 'as an experiment;'

'if favorable, to be continued, if adverse, to be dropped of course.'"¹

Instead of *ninety* candidates,—the highest number that had ever offered in one year for the school for boys,—it was ascertained that nearly *three hundred* would be presented for the High School for Girls. The spacious room provided for the school would not accommodate more than *one hundred and twenty*; and it was evident that, either *two high schools for girls must be established the first year*, or that more than one half of the candidates must be rejected, to the great disappointment of their parents and instructors.

In this dilemma, a special meeting of the School Committee was called, on the twenty-first of February, the day previous to that appointed for the examination; and, after much deliberation on the course to be pursued, they resolved to keep the number to be admitted under their own control; and for this purpose passed a vote, that the Sub-Committee, appointed, as examiners, should report to the School Committee, "*the names, ages, and standing of all the candidates they should find qualified for admission*, that THIS COMMITTEE MAY DETERMINE WHAT CLASSES OF THEM SHALL BE ADMITTED."²

The examination of applicants for admission was held on Washington's Birthday, and 286 candidates presented themselves. In the face of much complaint, the plan adopted by the School Committee was carried out. The number was reduced by a process of elimination, based on the credits received by the several applicants in the examination. In this way 130 girls were admitted and the school was opened on the 27th of February, with Ebenezer Bailey in charge.

The school was highly successful from the start in furthering all of the ends for which it was established. It was visited "almost daily" by gentlemen who came from different and distant parts of the country for the purpose of examining into the methods of education pursued in Boston.

In August, 1826, a report was presented to the School Committee, asking for the continued support and enlargement of the school, and presenting the following information: "That the present number of the school was one hundred and thirty; that few, if any, could be excluded the present year; that, according

¹ QUINCY, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

² *Idem.*, p. 218.

to the best calculations that could be made, the number of the candidates for admission at the then next ensuing examination, would be four hundred and twenty-seven, who, if they were all admitted, and those now in the school retained, it would be necessary that five hundred and fifty-seven members of it should be provided for."²

The School Committee could not face with equanimity this tremendous increase in the school, together with the increased financial burden which it would entail. Accordingly a change was adopted on the 17th of November, 1826, in accordance with which the age of admission was raised from eleven to fourteen; the requirement for admission was raised so as to include all branches taught in the public grammar schools; the time which a pupil might continue in the school was reduced from three years to one; and no girl might be admitted after the age of sixteen. On this basis the school was continued for a second year.

But these changes did not offer a satisfactory solution of the problem. In December, 1827, the School Committee was equally divided on the question of the expediency of continuing the school. The question was accordingly left over for settlement by the new School Committee then about to be elected. Mayor Quincy, then re-elected for his sixth term, in his inaugural address before the City Council, in January, 1828, took a position distinctly unfavorable to the school as then constituted.

Every school [he declared], the admission to which is predicated upon the principles of requiring higher attainments, at a specified age or period of life, than the mass of children in the ordinary course of school instruction at that age or period can attain, is in fact a school for the benefit of the few, and not for the benefit of the many. Parents, who, having been highly educated themselves are, therefore, capable of forcing the education of their own children; parents, whose pecuniary ability enables them to educate their children at private schools, or who by domestic instruction are able to aid their advancement in the public schools, will for the most part enjoy the whole privilege. In form it may be general, but it will be in fact exclusive. The sound principle upon this subject seems to be, that the standard of public education should be raised to the greatest desirable and practicable

height ; but that it should be effected by raising the standard of our common schools.¹

On the twelfth of February, 1828, a sub-committee, of which the Mayor was chairman, presented to the School Committee an extended report, prepared by Mr. Quincy, in which the difficulties in the way of a continuance of the school were set forth in detail. It was estimated that if the school were to be continued on the basis which was at first proposed, "provision must be made for, from eight to twelve hundred scholars, in the first three years ; at an expense of two High School-houses with suitable preparations, which would cost not less than fifty thousand dollars ; and upon the supposition of the same ratio of masters and ushers to scholars (one to one hundred) and only the same rate of salaries as in our present Grammar schools, causing an additional expense of ten thousand eight hundred dollars annually ; with a certainty that the numbers and expense must annually increase."²

Such an outlay for the higher education of girls was of course out of the question. As Mr. Quincy remarked in his address to the Board of Aldermen on taking final leave of the office of Mayor : "No funds of any city could endure the expense."³

This sub-committee proposed various changes, which were adopted by the School Committee. These were :

1. The introduction of the Monitorial system into all our public Grammar and Writing schools, as soon as it is practicable.
2. The elevating and enlarging the standard of public education, in all our Grammar and Writing schools, so as to embrace the branches taught recently in our High School for girls.

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 409, 410. See also *Idem*, p. 271. It is evident that the term "common schools" was held by Mr. Quincy to denote schools of lower grade than the high school. In a communication to the School Committee in 1826, recommending that a knowledge of all the studies taught in the grammar and writing schools be required for admission to the High School, Mr. Quincy had said, "by an adherence to this system, it cannot be doubted that the High School will, in one or two years, become what it ought to be, a school for the instruction in those parts of science to which the common schools are from their constitutions inadequate, and for which they were not intended."

² *Am. Journ. Ed.*, Vol. XIII, p. 249.

³ *Municipal history of Boston*, p. 270.

To this object two things are plainly essential. 1. The introduction, as is proposed, of the monitorial system into the Grammar and Writing schools, because the High School for girls was instituted, conducted, and its studies arranged with reference to that system. 2. Removing the present fourth class from our Grammar and Writing schools: for unless this be done, it is impossible to introduce the elevated and enlarged course of studies proposed. 3. Introducing the monitorial system also into our Primary Schools, and thus effecting the requisite modification of those Schools.¹

On the third of June, the School Committee voted "that the girls be permitted to remain in the English Grammar Schools throughout the year." Accordingly, "the project of the High School for Girls was abandoned, and the scale of instruction in the Common Schools in the city was gradually elevated and enlarged."²

Mr. Bailey³ had resigned the mastership of the school in November, 1827, and had opened a private school for girls. The report of this sub-committee upon the failure of the High School for Girls called forth from him an indignant review. The mayor was charged with having been hostile to the school from the start and having sought by indirection to injure and cripple it. The pride of Bostonians in their schools was remarked, and their willingness to give them liberal support. The opinion that too much money was expended on the public schools, and that they should be merely eleemosynary institutions, had been heard from more than one member of the City Government, but from no one else. The mayor's high opinion of the monitorial schools of New York received unfavorable comment. Mr. Bailey had himself employed the monitorial system (and effectively, it would seem); but he declared that "I have no faith in the system which delegates the *authority* of the master to mere children, and *substitutes* the instruction and discipline of monitors for *his* personal services."

The implication in the sub-committee's report that the school

¹ *Am. Journ. Ed.*, p. 251.

² *Quincy, op. cit.*, p. 225.

³ Ebenezer Bailey was one of the founders of the American Institute of Instruction, a man of excellent abilities and winning personality, a highly successful teacher and a writer of recognized ability. An account of his life may be found in the twelfth volume of the *American Journal of Education*.

had failed, because it had been found impossible to bear the expense which the plan entailed, met with a vigorous protest from Mr. Bailey.

Grant that the High School for Girls was but an "experiment," [he says], it will not be denied that it was a very important one. It was the *first* institution of the kind ; and as such, not only excited a lively interest in our own community and country, but even in England, and on the Continent, the establishment of this school was honorably noticed in the public journals. It is highly important, therefore, to the general interests of female education, that the true result of this "experiment" should be known. If it were indeed a "failure,"—that is, if our own experience has made it certain that it is either inexpedient or impracticable to extend to females a liberal course of education,—it should warn others not to make the attempt. But if the "failure" proceeded from other causes, it should be exposed, that the great cause of female education may suffer no detriment."

He proceeds to show that the three specific ends for which the school was originally established had been accomplished "beyond the most sanguine expectations of those who had first proposed it." Even the masters of the grammar schools, who might have been expected to oppose it, were for the most part favorable to it. The mayor's dictum that a school organized with such requirements as to the age and scholarship of pupils admitted, was a school for the few and not for the many, was met by the assertion that the age requirement was merely incidental and arbitrary—that scholarship alone should be required for admission to the higher school. Finally, a bill of complaints was presented against the mayor on the ground that he had subjected the school to petty hindrances, annoyances, and neglect, the nature of which may be illustrated by the remark that, "The only written communication from the board with which I was honored for more than a year, was a letter from the mayor, reprimanding me 'in good set terms,' because the young ladies, of their own free will, and motion, had agreed among themselves to wear black silk aprons at the exhibition!"

Mr. Bailey's review would seem to have expressed not only his individual feeling on the subject, but a sentiment freely shared and expressed by many citizens.

In his farewell address to the Board of Aldermen, Mayor

Quincy made a brief but spirited reply to the criticisms which had been passed upon him in this matter.

The High School for Girls was effectually disposed of ; and so great was the influence of Boston in matters of public education, that this outcome undoubtedly affected unfavorably the whole movement in this country for the higher education of girls at municipal expense.

It was not until 1852 that efforts toward the repetition of the "experiment" in Boston met with any substantial encouragement. Nathan Bishop, the first Superintendent of Public Schools for the city, had recommended in his first annual report, issued at the end of the preceding year, that a Normal School be established as a part of the Boston system of public instruction. This suggestion having been approved by the School Committee, the City government on the 8th of July authorized the establishment of such a school. It was accordingly opened in the fall of 1852. Two years later, in response to the continued urgency of the friends of the more general education of girls, the Normal School was converted into a High School for Girls, in which a normal class was formed.